

XXVI.—*A few additional Notes on Birds of Egypt.*

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I LEFT Naples for my fourth visit to Egypt on March 9th, 1878, and arrived at Alexandria on the morning of the 14th. Our steamer was accompanied nearly the whole of the voyage by considerable numbers of *Larus leucophæus* and *Larus melanocephalus*, the latter already at that date in full breeding-plumage, with black head well developed. These were the only Gulls I saw until we came in sight of Alexandria, when the peculiar Egyptian race of *Larus fuscus*, with the very dark mantle, appeared in great numbers. On March 17th I went on to Cairo, which was my head quarters until April 16th. On March 21st I visited the Pyramids of Gizeh, where I found, as usual, those regular *habitués* of the locality, *Falco lanarius*, *Bubo ascalaphus*, and *Corvus umbrinus*. I also saw numbers of a bird I should not have expected to find in such a place—*Sylvia rueppelli*. On March 27th I went to Halouan, where there is an excellent hotel in the middle of the desert, fifteen miles due south of Cairo. The *raison d'être* of Halouan and its hotel is a copious spring of sulphureous water, celebrated for its efficacy in cutaneous and other diseases. I did not find Halouan a very good place for collecting; but it is the best head quarters from which to visit Sakara and the Pyramids of Dashoor. I remained three days at Halouan, and then returned to Cairo. On April 6th I went to Port Said, passing a night at Ismailia on the way. I found Port Said a very good place for Terns and Gulls, but I did not get much else. Port Said has the great merit of possessing a first-rate hotel. I stayed there three days, and then returned to Cairo, where I remained until April 16th, when I went to Damietta, where I made the acquaintance of Mr. Eugene Fillipponi, a resident in that town, of whom I had heard from Mr. J. H. Gurney, jun., and from whom I got some rather nice birds. At Damietta I came in for spring visitants, and found *Oriolus galbula*, *Cuculus canorus*, and *Yunx torquilla* far more numerous than I had ever before

* See for previous Notes Ibis, 1859, p. 41, and 1867, p. 48.

seen them in Egypt. I went from Damietta to Alexandria on April 20th, whence, three days later, I left Egypt for Marseilles direct by French steamer. On our voyage many land-birds, evidently on their migration northwards, settled on the rigging of our ship to rest. Among them I remember especially several Turtle Doves (*Turtur vulgaris*) and Yellow Wagtails (*Motacilla flava*), and one Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). This last was caught asleep on its perch in the rigging by one of the crew shortly after sunset. In the following notes I do not give a list of the birds seen or shot by me. I only mention those about which I have something to say in addition to, or differing from, what has already been said by myself or other writers on Egyptian ornithology.

AQUILA CLANGA (Pallas). Greater Spotted Eagle.

A very large female of this species was shot by an Arab on 18th April near Damietta, while I was staying there. It was skinned by Mr. Fillipponi, purchased from him by me, and is now in my collection. It is decidedly the largest individual of the species I have ever seen, as it measures 31 inches in length. The date on which it was shot (April 18th) is unusually late, and would lead one to suspect that this species does sometimes stay to breed in that country.

BUTEO DESERTORUM (Daudin). Desert-Buzzard.

A friend of mine shot an unusually large individual of this species, while Quail-shooting near the Pyramids of Gizeh, a few days before my arrival at Cairo. It is now in my possession, and is the first and only specimen of the species from Egypt that I have ever seen.

BUTEO VULGARIS (Leach). Common Buzzard.

On the 18th of April I shot, near Damietta, the very smallest Buzzard I ever saw. It is not more than two thirds of the usual size, and is very dark in colour. On dissection I was unable to find any trace of sexual organs. Crop crammed with lizards and small snakes.

FALCO LANARIUS, Linn. Lanner Falcon.

This is a great frequenter of pyramids; and I seldom visit

those of Gizeh without obtaining either birds or eggs. On March 24, 1870, I took a nest containing five eggs of this species on the third Pyramid of Gizeh. I saw the parent bird fly off the nest, but did not get a shot at it. The eggs were much incubated, and pale in colour. I searched for the nest on the occasion of my last visit to the pyramids of Gizeh, on the 21st of March last, but did not find it. I saw, however, a pair of Lanners soaring round the summit of the third Pyramid; and the male bird was brought to me at Cairo a few days after by an Arab. A pair of Lanners also frequent, and, doubtless; annually breed on, the northern pyramid of Dashoor. I have noticed that in this species the sexes differ less in size than in any other species of Falcon with which I am acquainted.

BUBO ASCALAPHUS (Sav.). Egyptian Eagle-Owl.

This fine Owl also frequents, and annually breeds on, the Pyramids of Gizeh. On March 24, 1870, I shot a male; and on March 21 of the present year I got a nest containing two eggs, together with the female bird, on the third Pyramid. This Owl lays only two eggs.

CENTROPUS ÆGYPTIUS (Gm.). Egyptian Coucal.

I have never met with this bird since my first visit to Egypt in 1854, when I shot a specimen in the Delta. I have lately been told, on perfectly trustworthy authority, that it is especially common about Rosetta, a locality little visited by Egyptian travellers.

CUCULUS CANORUS, Linn. Common Cuckoo.

Very abundant near Damietta on April 18.

YUNX TORQUILLA, Linn. Wryneck.

In great numbers all about Damietta on April 18.

LANIUS LAHTORA, Sykes. Pallid Shrike.

Very local, but abundant in certain localities. I saw a great number of these Shrikes close to the railway-line between the stations of Chibin el Kanater and Belbeis, on the direct Cairo and Zagazig line, on my journey both to and from Ismailia at the beginning of last April. They were

perched on the low bushes on the railway embankment, and were so tame that they barely moved as the train passed. I saw them nowhere else except between the above-named stations.

This is not a common species in Egyptian collections.

MUSCICAPA ATRICAPILLA, Linn. Pied Flycatcher.

MUSCICAPA COLLARIS, Bechst. Collared Flycatcher.

Both these species tolerably common all about Cairo from March 20 to April 15.

SAXICOLA ALBICOLLIS (Vieillot). Eared Chat.

I shot and skinned at Halouan, on March 29, an individual of this species that ought to have been a female; for it was in exactly the plumage figured and described by Mr. Dresser as the adult female of this Chat. Great was my surprise when, on dissection, it proved to be a male. Have the sexual distinctions of the Chats been thoroughly elucidated?

SYLVIA RUEPPELLI, Temm. Rüppell's Warbler.

Nothing surprises me so much as the fact that Mr. Gurney did not meet with this species. I found it extremely common all about Cairo all the time I was there, *i. e.* from March 20 to April 15. At the Pyramids it was abundant, creeping about among the heaps of huge stones, and when disturbed taking refuge in the crevices, just like a Chat (*Saxicola*) would do. Indeed the desert around the Pyramids would seem altogether more suited for Chats than for Warblers; and I was surprised to see this species so plentiful there. I also found it in considerable numbers between Abbassieh and Heliopolis, creeping about among low bushes and hedges. I shot several both at the Pyramids and also here.

PASSER SALICICOLA (Vieillot). Spanish Sparrow.

Captain Shelley says ('Birds of Egypt,' page 149) that he never met with this species later than the beginning of February; and Mr. Gurney seems to have found it rather rare. On the contrary, I found it in great numbers all about Cairo up to the date of my departure from that place on the 16th of April, which leads me to the conclusion that it re-

mains to breed in Egypt. I quite admit that *Passer domesticus* is the Sparrow of the towns; but I still maintain my previously expressed opinion that this species is fully as abundant as that one in the open country. The heaps of dead Sparrows exposed for sale in the Cairo bird-market, which I visited almost daily, contained generally a greater number of this species than of *Passer domesticus*. Early in April, at Heliopolis, I saw a lot of Sparrows congregated on a low sont tree. I took a family shot, and brought down eight of them. Two were females. Of the remaining six, five were males of this species in full breeding-plumage, and the other was *Passer domesticus*—which shows that the two species occasionally congregate together, a fact of which I was not previously aware.

CORVUS UMBRINUS, Hedenborg. Brown-necked Raven.

This bird breeds regularly at the Pyramids of Gizeh in a certain hole in the second Pyramid. I visited the hole on the 21st of March last. The nest and birds were there; but the eggs were not yet laid. This species differs from the common Raven, *Corvus corax*, not only in size and colour, but also in having the wing-primaries longer and much more pointed. The legs are also, I think, longer and stronger in proportion to the size of the bird.

TURTUR ISABELLINUS, Bonaparte.

I first saw this Dove on March 29, at Halouan, where I shot the only one I saw there. I afterwards found it pretty common between Abbassieh and Heliopolis. This is considerably further north than Mr. Gurney found it.

IBIS ÆTHIOPICA (Lath.). Sacred Ibis.

I saw a fine adult specimen of this bird (the *Ibis religiosa* of authors) in the collection of M. Eugene Fillipponi at Damietta, who told me that it had been shot by an Arab near Lake Menzaleh last November. The Arab said that he saw a pair, but only succeeded in shooting one of them. M. Fillipponi entertained what I thought rather an exaggerated idea of the value of this specimen; so I did not purchase it, and he has it still for sale. I believe that this species has

not previously been obtained or seen in Egypt by any recent traveller.

STREPSILAS INTERPRES (Linn.). Turnstone.

M. Fillipponi had three or four specimens, all obtained near Damietta, of which I now possess one. This bird is new to the Egyptian list.

LARUS FUSCUS, Linn. Lesser Black-back Gull.

This is decidedly the most abundant of all the large Gulls in Egypt. I found it especially common at Port Said, where I shot several of them. Specimens from Egypt have the mantle peculiarly dark in colour—much darker than those from other parts of the Mediterranean, or from the British coasts.

LARUS LEUCOPHÆUS, Licht. Yellow-legged Herring-Gull.

This is the commonest of the large Gulls all round the coasts of Italy and Sicily, in the Bosphorus, and generally all over the eastern portion of the Mediterranean. In Egypt, however, it is much less numerous than *Larus fuscus*.

LARUS ICHTHYAETUS, Pall. Great Black-headed Gull.

It strikes me that this splendid Gull has become more abundant of late years in Egypt. I saw several flying about at Port Said and Damietta; and M. Fillipponi had no less than four fine specimens, of which I took one.

LARUS GELASTES, Licht. Slender-billed Gull.

I shot an immature individual of this species at Port Said on the 9th of April last. Great was my surprise to find that the legs, feet, and bill were pale dull yellow; iris silvery white, as in the adult; sex, male. As far as I know, it has never before been noted that in the immature state of this species the legs and bill are yellow.

LARUS RIDIBUNDUS, Linn. Black-headed Gull.

Abundant at Port Said. None of those that I shot there on April 9th had yet assumed the dark head. This species is found on the Nile, a long way up the river.

LARUS MELANOCEPHALUS, Natt. Mediterranean Black-headed Gull.

This Gull is not so much given to ascending rivers as the preceding species. In Egypt I have never seen it except at Alexandria, where it is not very common. At Naples, where it abounds, it had already assumed the black head by the end of the first week of March.

+ STERNA CASPIA, Pall. Caspian Tern.

Common at Port Said and at Damietta.

+ STERNA CANTIACA, Gm. Sandwich Tern.

I saw several in Alexandria Harbour on March 15th.

+ STERNA ANGLICA, Montagu. Gull-billed Tern.

I saw a considerable number of these Terns hovering over some flooded rice-fields near Damietta on April 17th.

+ PUFFINUS KUHLI (Boie). Cinereous Shearwater.

A specimen of this Shearwater was in the shop of Mr. Mayer, a bird-stuffer at Alexandria, who told me that he had shot it close to that town early in the month of April last.

+ PUFFINUS YELCOUAN (Acerbi).

Mr. Mayer had also a specimen of this bird, shot at Alexandria. Many writers consider this species identical with *Puffinus anglorum*. I think it may readily be distinguished by the paler and browner tint of the upper part of the body, and by the colour of the under tail-coverts, which are greyish brown instead of white.

+ FULIGULA RUFINA (Pall.). Red-crested Duck.

Mr. Fillipponi had a fine male specimen of this Duck, shot at Damietta, which I have brought to this country. This species is new to the Egyptian list.